

THE COMMON GOOD / CONSIDER THE ELEMENTS

Spring 2010

During these challenging fiscal times, we are often asked why the State of Maryland should continue to purchase and conserve land. The benefits of land conservation are many, and long-lived. They reach far beyond the immediate needs of our society, impacting the future of our environment, our economy, and our children.

Since 1969, the money used to protect Maryland's landscape has come from a dedicated fund source — one-half of 1 percent of the transfer tax citizens pay when purchasing a home or property in Maryland. Program Open Space, one of the nation's premiere land preservation programs, was designed to make sure that we could protect the character of our state and its landscape as we grew. If we turned our back on land preservation every time there was a pressing need for funding elsewhere, we would never have preserved one acre of land.

Instead, here in Maryland, we understand that land conservation in general makes economic, environmental and social sense. Our public lands support jobs and property values, help clean our air and water, and provide countless benefits to citizens.

Purchasing land in a depressed real estate market is an especially good value for taxpayers. In fact, every State dollar spent on land conservation has a multiplying effect on local economies.

Maryland's forests support more than 40,000 jobs and yield over \$38 million annually in State and local revenues. Agriculture supports 350,000 jobs and \$17 billion in revenue. Local open space purchases also support jobs; one such purchase in Cecil County is now the site of a recreation center that created 32 new jobs.

Activities that take place on public lands, such as hunting and birding, are also vital economic drivers. Tourism — including ecotourism — is Maryland's third leading

industry, bringing millions of dollars into local economies.

A hunter visiting Maryland's Eastern Shore spends an average of \$367 per night at



Secretary Griffin and Governor O'Malley

restaurants, hotels and sporting retailers. This translates into a \$700 million impact on our economy each year. In fact, according to the Coalition of Natural Resource Societies, 2006 fishing, hunting and wildlife associated recreation opportunities generated nearly \$1.5 billion in revenue for Maryland.

Along our State's thousands of miles of coast, many of our public land purchases create opportunities for boating and water trail access — an industry the University of Maryland estimates has a \$2 billion annual economic impact in Maryland and supports some 35,000 jobs.

Local governments also benefit when DNR buys land, because hunting and timber revenues exceed the potential loss in land tax. For example, a recent addition to Chesapeake Forest Lands resulted in a revenue gain for Dorchester County, which will now receive a percentage of ongoing timber and hunting revenues from land previously assessed at an agricultural value.

Conservation of natural areas protects air and water quality as well as a secure, local supply of food and drinking water. These



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are essential resources for Maryland citizens and prevent the need to spend money on transportation and treatment for foreign food and water supplies.

Large-scale land conservation is one of the most important tools we have to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Our contiguous forests in Western Maryland serve as carbon storehouses. Our wetlands protect our coastal communities from the impacts of sea level rise.

Parks and public open spaces bolster quality of life for citizens, make communities more desirable for businesses and increase property values. According to the National Park Service, properties adjacent to trails and greenways are worth 5 percent to 32 percent more than those that are not. Especially in urban and suburban areas, access to safe places to walk improves the health of children and adults, which in turn reduces health care costs.

Even though land acquisitions are paid for through a dedicated funding, when necessary

— including in our Fiscal Year 2011 — we do apply these monies to the General Fund to address the State's immediate economic needs. By instead taking advantage of current market opportunities through bond financing, we are also making sure we can continue to protect our land — a finite resource — and by so doing our State's investment in our economic and environmental future, helping to save jobs and lessen cuts to priority health and human service programs.

Even in tough economic times, we must continue to make land conservation in Maryland a priority. The health of our environment, our economy and our children depend on it.

Martin O'Malley
Governor

John R. Griffin
Secretary